

Secret Gems

OF CENTRAL PARK

By Lisa Fields

Burnett Fountain in the Conservatory Garden

My favorite places in Central Park include The Pond for bird-watching, Turtle Pond by Belvedere Castle because it teems with turtles, Loeb Boathouse when I feel like rowing beneath picturesque Bow Bridge, and Wollman Rink for ice skating. I gravitate toward my usual haunts with such regularity that I stopped visiting other areas of the park. One day, I made a point to explore more of its 840-acres and discovered these secret gems:

Hallett Nature Sanctuary I started my day at Hallett Nature Sanctuary, a woodland near East 62nd Street. It's tricky to find because it has only one entrance, a rustic wooden gate which opens at 10:00 a.m. I was the first person to enter that morning.

As I hiked down the mulch paths, chirping birds drowned out the sounds of the city. I wandered for a half-hour, enjoying every viewpoint, the higher ones of the cityscape and the lower ones of The Pond. The longer I walked through this peaceful sanctuary, the more I convinced myself that I was in the woods in upstate New York.

Dene Slope Dene Slope, near East 66th Street, is a hillside,

wildflower meadow that blooms white, yellow, pink, magenta and lavender. I'd never seen so many monarch butterflies in Central Park until I found this meadow, which is also a good spot for people-watching.

Swedish Cottage Swedish Cottage is a two-story, 19th century log cabin near West 79th Street at the foot of the Shakespeare Garden. It was built in Sweden for America's Centennial Exposition in 1876 in Philadelphia. A year later, Frederick Law Olmsted, co-designer of Central Park, brought the cottage to its current location. In 1973, the park built a permanent theater inside the cottage. Since then, thousands of families have enjoyed productions, like *Peter Pan* and *Cinderella*, for a nominal fee.

Ravine Walk The Ravine Walk runs through Central Park's North Woods. This secluded path meanders along The Loch, a stream that runs from the Huddleston Arch near 105th Street to Glen Span, another arch near Lasker Rink. Along the way, there are a half-dozen waterfalls of varying heights, as well as the two impressive stone arches. As I walked, chipmunks ran across the path, and birds chirped from within the thick canopy of trees.